

# • Wisconsin Women's Political Firsts •

## Wisconsin

*first State to ratify*

**19th Amendment**

Giving Women the Vote

The Wisconsin Women's Suffrage Association was formed 50 years earlier, in 1869—the year the Wisconsin legislature passed a law allowing women to run for school boards and other elective school offices, though they still could not vote in school board elections until 1884!

Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-7679  
Political Equality League, Milwaukee  
used with permission



**Dena Smith**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**WI State Treasurer**

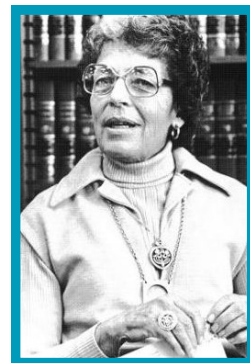
Initially appointed to the vacancy caused by her husband's death, she was elected to the office in 1960 becoming the first woman elected to a statewide constitutional office in Wisconsin.

**Virginia Hart**  
*first woman appointed to a*  
**Governor's Cabinet Post**

Appointed as Secretary of the Department of Regulations and Licensing.

Photo: WI Office of State Employment Relations Web Site

**Barbara Thompson**  
*first woman elected as*  
**State Superintendent of Education**



**Shirley Abrahamson**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**WI Supreme Court Justice**

**Vel Phillips**  
*first woman elected as*  
**WI Secretary of State**

And, the first African-American woman in the *nation* elected to a statewide office.

Earlier in her career, she was the first woman and first African-American elected to the Milwaukee City Council (1956), and the first black woman to serve as a judge in WI (1971).

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Photo used with permission



**Senator Susan Engeleiter**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**Senate Minority Leader**



**Justice Shirley Abrahamson**  
After two decades on the Court, becomes the *first woman to serve as* **Chief Justice of the WI Supreme Court**

**Senator Margaret Farrow**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**Lieutenant Governor**

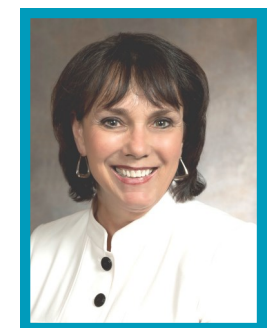


**Senator Mary Panzer**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**Senate Majority Leader**



**JoCasta Zamarripa**  
*first Latina elected to*  
**WI State Legislature**, elected to the State Assembly

**Representative Pat Strachota**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**Assembly Majority Leader**



1919

1957

1973

1976

1979

1985

1996

2001

2003

2011

2014

1925

1964

1975

1977

1983

1987

1998

2002

2004

2012

2015



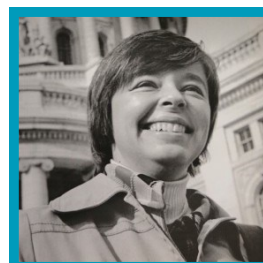
**Mildred Barber**  
**Helen Brooks**  
**Helen Thompson**  
*first women elected to the*  
**WI State Legislature**  
elected to the State Assembly  
Originally called "Assemblymen" like their male colleagues, the official title for all members was changed to "Representative to the Assembly" in 1969.

**Governor's Commission on the Status of Women**  
*established*  
Kay Clarenbach, Chair

The Commission followed the WI Conference on the Changing Status of Women and remained in existence from 1964 to 1989.

Nationally, Kay Clarenbach was instrumental in the creation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Women's Political Caucus.

**Kathryn Morrison**  
*first woman elected to*  
**WI State Senate**



Wisconsin State Journal Photo used with permission

**Marcia Coggs**  
*first African-American woman elected to*  
**WI State Legislature**, elected to the State Assembly

Pictured 4th from the right below.



**Wisconsin Women's Council**  
*formed as a state agency*

The Council has a 15-member board appointed by the Governor and Legislative Leadership.



Women's Council Archives

**Representative Betty Jo Nelsen**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**Assembly Minority Leader**



**Tammy Baldwin**  
*first woman elected to*  
**U.S. Congress** from WI, elected to the U.S. House of Representatives

Previously, served in WI State Assembly (1992-1998)

**Representative Shirley Krug**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**Democratic Assembly Minority Leader**

**Barbara Lawton**  
*first woman elected as*  
**Lieutenant Governor**

**Peg Lautenschlager**  
*first woman elected as*  
**WI Attorney General**

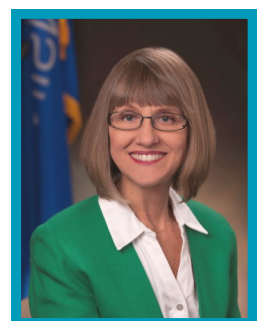


**Gwen Moore**  
*first African-American woman elected to*  
**U.S. Congress** from WI, elected to the U.S. House of Representatives

Previously, served in WI State Assembly and State Senate (1989 to 2004)

**Senator Judy Robson**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**Democratic Senate Minority Leader (2004)** and **Majority Leader (2007)**.

**Senator Mary Lazich**  
*first woman to serve as*  
**Senate President**



**Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin**  
After seven terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, is the *first woman elected to* **U.S. Senate** from WI

*When Seeking Status for Women*  
**It's No Time to Be Ladylike**  
WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL-OCTOBER, 1965

Source materials list on back.

Wisconsin Women's Council



[www.womenscouncil.wi.gov](http://www.womenscouncil.wi.gov)

TIMELINE OF WISCONSIN WOMEN’S POLITICAL FIRSTS (2015)

Source Materials

Legislative Reference Bureau, “Wisconsin Legislators—A Historical List,” Wisconsin Briefs, 15-3, January 2015, [legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb](http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb).

Legislative Reference Bureau, Wisconsin Blue Book, 2013-2014, [legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb](http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb).

“The Women’s Suffrage Movement,” Wisconsin Historical Society, [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org).

“Assembly Women of Distinction,” Office of the Assembly Chief Clerk, [www.wisconsin.gov](http://www.wisconsin.gov); State of Wisconsin, Elected Officials, [www.wisconsin.gov](http://www.wisconsin.gov).

Photographs

*"Car Full of Suffragists"* Members of the Political Equality League, Milwaukee, WHS-7679, Wisconsin Historical Society, Photo Archives, [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org)

*Kathryn Morrison*, Wisconsin State Journal, [www.madison.com](http://www.madison.com)

*Vel Phillips*, Wisconsin Journal Sentinel, [www.wsjonline.com](http://www.wsjonline.com)

Wisconsin Legislators, Current and Past Official Photos, [www.wisconsin.gov](http://www.wisconsin.gov)

*Senator Tammy Baldwin*, Office of Senator Tammy Baldwin web site, [www.baldwin.senate.gov](http://www.baldwin.senate.gov) (past official photo)

Congresswoman Gwen Moore, Office of Congresswoman Gwen Moore website, [www.gwenmoore.house.gov](http://www.gwenmoore.house.gov) (official photo)

*Governor Tony Earl signing the executive order creating the Wisconsin Women’s Council, with women leaders in the State Legislature and Administration.* Pictured (left to right) Sen. Susan Engleiter 2. (not identified) 3. Eileen Mershart (Deputy Secretary DOR) 4. Doris Hanson (DOA Secretary) 5. Rep. Barb Gronemus 6. Rep. Mary Lou Munts 7. Rep. Sharon Metz 8. Rep. Barb Ulichny 9. Rep. Marsha Coggs 10. Linda Reivitz (DHSS Secretary) 11. Rep. Lolita Schneiders 12. Roberta Gassman (Policy Advisor Governor’s Office), Women’s Council archives

Did we miss someone? Please contact the Women’s Council at [womenscouncil@wi.gov](mailto:womenscouncil@wi.gov) with suggested corrections or updates.

Disclaimer. The information and sequence of events on the *Timeline of Wisconsin Women’s Political Firsts* is indicative only and not exhaustive. The information has been gathered from a variety of sources. Neither the Wisconsin Women’s Council, its members and staff, nor any other party involved in providing this study warrant that the information contained in the here is in every respect accurate or complete.